

# Hospice welcome home during mom's final days

BY SARA DIMERMAN

I'm browsing through a column that I wrote several years ago on mothers and daughters. In it I wrote how my mother had presented me on my 40th birthday with a tiny cushion on which was embroidered "a daughter is just a little girl who grows up to be a friend".

That just about sums up our relationship. My mother is my best friend. Her mother was her best friend until age forced them to switch roles and my mother became her mother's caregiver. And now I, too, have become one of her caregivers.

If you had asked me months ago how I would be spending the morning of my 50th birthday, I would never have said that I'd be sitting in the living room of Hill House, a hospice in Richmond Hill.

My mother, one of cancer's victims, is nestled into their yellow room, one of only three rooms at Hill House. Like a broken baby bird, her wings cannot take flight. Her limbs are fragile and weak. Outwardly she seems so accepting of the path fate has chosen for her, but I wonder about what is truly going on in her head.

## BEAUTIFUL GARDEN

She has a view of a beautiful garden with a bird bath and watches the squirrels and blue jays taking turns eating and drinking. We — her family — take turns spending time with her, not as her caregivers, as we were at home, but as her children, her husband. We have time to care for one another, holding each other and supporting each other through the darkest days of our lives.

The window is open and a cool breeze caresses the air around us. We smell freshly brewed coffee and just baked chocolate chip cookies.

Mom asks if I can bring her a small cup of coffee. She just wants to breathe in the aroma. I'm sure this conjures up memories of simple pleasures. As I sit at her bed, her hand in mine, I thank her for giving me life.

It's been almost two years since her diagnosis. Two long years of hospitalizations, surgeries, radiation, chemotherapy, transfusions and cat scans. Two long years of being prodded and poked by surgeons and doctors and radiologists. Years of fear and numbness and anger and the window of hope closing.

## WORD HAUNT ME

I remember too well the day she was told the cancer had fought its way back into her body. The day she was told surgery was no longer an option. Her words "I may not make it to your 50th birthday" haunt me. Yes, she has made it, but just barely.

Amazing how the word hospice used to send chills down our spines. Mom knew all too well that a hospice was "the end of the line" as she put it. And yet, when the time was right, she asked us to find one for her. And we are so glad we did.

At Hill House, there are no mirrors. No reflections of the person's outer self as an awful reminder of how much has changed. The kitchen



is the hub of the home, as it should be. The wonderful caregivers keep careful records in binders at the kitchen table and check on her often.

Mom doesn't have to worry about anything. After so many years of taking care of others, she is giving others permission to care for her. She is comfortable and luxuriating (if that's possible) in their warm hands, enjoying massage and the love and 24/7 attention they give her.

Now that I've had a glimpse into the most compassionate, caring environment that I could ever have hoped my mother would experi-

ence, I know that my charitable dollars will be going towards creating safe havens for palliative care patients. Far away from code blues and beeping monitors and gurneys being left in long dark hallways and IVs waiting to be changed. A place where families can be free to be together in their loved one's final days.

*Sara Dimerman is the parenting columnist for The Liberal. She lives in Thornhill and counsels individuals, couples and families as a registered psychologist.*

To learn more about Hill House or to make donations, visit [www.hillhousehospice.com](http://www.hillhousehospice.com)

Hill House executive director Anne-Marie Dean holds a thank you donation box presented to her by grateful grandchildren of Sue Freeman, who passed away Sept. 24 at the hospice, including the children of parenting columnist Sara Dimerman.

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